

CHARACTER CONSTRUCTION

How authors *construct* and *present* characters

In groups, develop notes for a profile on the main character in your text under each of the headings below.

Begin with what you can remember from your first reading of the text, and then read or view your text to find more detailed evidence.

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------|
| - name | - age | - education |
| - family | - work | - health |
| - relationships | - friends | - interests |
| - turning points/challenges | - life experiences | - adversaries |
| - dress/costume | - physical appearance | - body language |
| - political, religious, cultural and social background | | |

Present your findings to the class.

Then, as a class, discuss:

- Is the information presented by each group accurate?
- Did all the groups select the same material for presentation?
- What does your profile NOT tell you about the character?

How a text's structure can shape the way we see characters

Go through your selected text and create a table identifying the key events that occur in each chapter or section. List them in order in which they appear in the text.

Now represent the events in chronological order on a timeline.

- Does the order of events differ? If so, why do you think the author chose to arrange them in the way they have?
- How does the way the text is ordered position us to see the characters? For example, are flashbacks used to show how the character has changed?

How contextual information helps us to understand a text's characters

As a class, develop a glossary of any vocabulary you will need to research so that you can develop a detailed picture of the key characters in your selected text.

What aspects of the text do you not understand? What contextual research would help you understand it better?

How the setting of a text informs the way we see its characters

Work in groups, with each group allocated part of the selected text. Create a poster that visually represents the settings of your section of the text. You may produce your own illustrations, or find appropriate ones from media sources. Annotate your illustrations with quotations from the text that support your interpretation of the setting.

Arrange your posters in the order in which they occur in your text and have each group present them in that order to the rest of the class.

As a class, discuss how the setting and changes in setting add to our understanding of a character or characters.

Why it is important to know who is telling the story

Provide reasons and examples for your responses to the following questions

First-person narrator:

- What do they tell you explicitly about their personality traits?
- What do the narrator's descriptions of other people tell you about the narrator? For example, do they like other people, are they envious, insecure, sympathetic?
- Is the narrator self-critical? Do they condemn any of their own actions or are they unaware of their faults?
- Does their view of themselves change over time? How does the author allow you to understand this?
- How does the narrator position the reader to respond to them? Do you, for example, like them even when they are behaving badly, or do you dislike them even though they are behaving well?
- Find examples of different tones adopted by the narrator, for example, ironic, critical, humorous or bitter.
- Does the text present points of view other than the narrator's, and if so, how?

What dialogue tells us about characters

Based on examples of dialogue involving one or more of the main characters, respond to the following:

- In what register are the characters speaking?
- What do the examples of their dialogue tell you about them?
- Do any of the characters speak in different ways to other characters? What does this tell you about them?
- Does the way a character speaks change over time? If so, how and why?

How the author's choice of vocabulary and sentence structure influences how we see characters

Select a passage from your selected text and, in tabular form, identify examples of the way the author has used key nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs to describe a character, and how they impact on your understanding of them.

Man, merchant, bully	nouns	
Big, loud, course	adjectives	Negative adjectives depict unpleasant man
inflating	verbs	Gives impression of being full of air
	adverbs	

How appeals to the senses shape the way we see characters

List the five senses and try to find examples of how the creator of your selected text appeals to each of them.

How do these appeals to senses contribute to your understanding of character?

How our view of characters is shaped by the author's use of figurative language

Identify and find references to one or more symbols and one or more metaphors in your selected text.

Write quotations from your text which includes references to these symbols and metaphors.

Create a poster, combining your quotations and visual images – either hand drawn or taken from magazines – to illustrate the symbols and metaphors.

Answer the following questions:

- a. How and why do references to the symbols and metaphors change in the text?
- b. How do these symbols and metaphors contribute to the reader's understanding of the characters presented in the text?

What we can learn about a character from their relationships with other characters

Create a character map, placing your character in the centre and representing their relationships with other characters.

Skim through your text, identifying:

- a. key moments when the relationships between the main character and other characters change, and suggesting why this is so
- b. the ways in which the author has positioned you to view this change

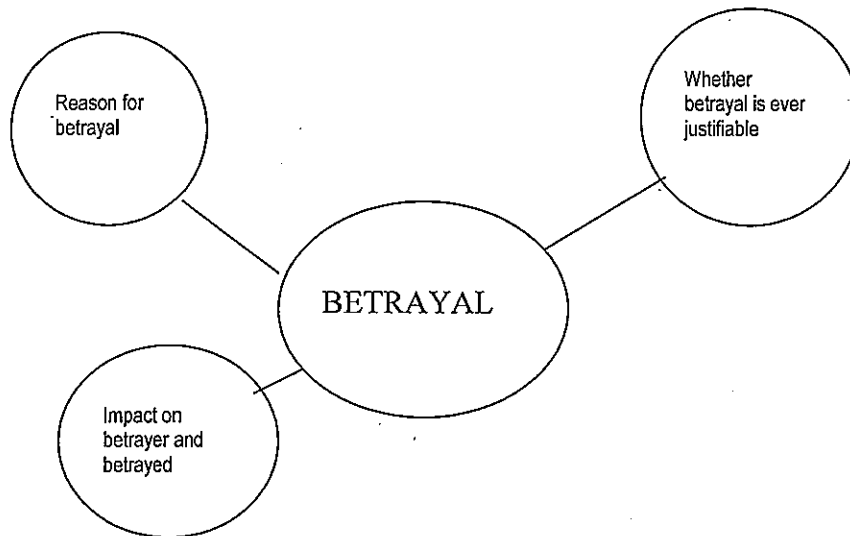
Understanding the character as a whole

1. Hold a class debate about one of the characters, for example, whether a character engages the reader's sympathy, or whether they learn from their mistakes.
2. Create a timeline, showing how key characters change over time.
3. Develop a quotation bank, listing telling quotations about each of the key characters.
4. Try and see a character in terms of their positive and negative attributes. Write a positive, and then a negative description of them.
5. Prepare a one-minute speech for your class, summing up a character as succinctly as you can.
6. Create annotated visual displays of how key characters relate to each other.
7. Practise writing paragraphs about how the creator of your text has used particular language features to construct their characters. For example, based on your groups poster depicting key symbols, write a piece on how a symbol represents the character, and any change over time.

IDEAS THEMES AND VALUES

What is a theme?

As a class, brainstorm as many themes as you can think of and suggest some of the ideas they might entail, for example:



How themes are presented in a text

As a class, develop a concept map creating an overview of the themes presented in your selected text. For each of these themes consider:

- a. What ideas about themes does the author develop?
- b. Which themes overlap?

Create a blurb for the back cover of a new edition of the text, indicating some of its key themes.

Interpreting and analysing themes and values presented in texts

How can you contextualise themes and values?

As a class, and as an ongoing activity, develop a glossary of vocabulary associated with ideas, themes and values explored in the text.

Identify aspects of themes and values explored in your text that you do not understand, and consider what contextual research would help you to understand it better. Each member of the class could research a nominated area and present brief findings to the rest of the class.

How does the way a text is structured shape the presentation of themes and values?

Refer to the plot timeline you created in your study of character.

- a. Identify how a character's values are reinforced or changed as a result of plot developments.
- b. Annotate the plot timeline, indicating when new ideas or themes are introduced.

Who is the narrator and what are their values?

In groups, scan your text and create a table identifying examples where the narrator describes an event, a character or a setting that tells us something about the values being condoned or condemned.

example	notes on how the author uses language to position the reader to condone or condemn values
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Find further examples in your text of characters who exemplify, conform, or transgress the values held by their society.

What do characters reveal about themes and values?

In groups, use Photoshop or paper and magazine photographs and visuals to create a collage that represents a key character in your text and the social, historical and cultural values that shape the ways they behave.

Annotate your representation with selected quotations from the text depicting their values in a positive or negative light.

What does dialogue tell us about themes and values?

Divide the class into group, and allocate sections of the text to study. Each group should identify an example or examples of dialogue and explain to the rest of the class:

- how what is being said develops aspects of the ideas and themes being explored in the text
- the values that underpin what is being said
- how the reader is being positioned to view these ideas and values

How does the setting of a text relate to themes and values?

Skim through your selected text and identify passages where different settings are described or depicted, and respond to the following:

- How does the narrator describe setting? Comment on how they have used language to do so.
- How has the author appealed to different senses in the presentation of the setting?
- How does each setting relate to ideas and values being explored in the text?

How does the author's choice of other language features relate to themes and values?

Skim through your text and write a response to the following: 'How does the author's use of a recurrent metaphor or symbol develop understanding of a theme explored in the text?'

Themes and values explored in the text as a whole

- Hold a class debate about one of the ideas raised in the text.
- Develop a quotation bank, listing apposite quotations about key themes.
- Prepare a one –minute speech for your class, summing up a theme as succinctly as you can.
- Create an annotated visual display of how key themes are connected.
- Practise writing paragraphs about how the creator of your text has used particular language features to develop a theme.
- Select several values embodied in the text and write notes on how these are exemplified, transgressed or challenged in your text.
- Create character sketches, describing key characters in terms of their values and the ways their actions embody them.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

How the same text can be open to different interpretations

1. Try to find two reviews or two commentaries on your text.
2. Compare how the two pieces interpret your text or an aspect of it.
3. What evidence has been provided to support the interpretation?
4. Which do you consider to be more convincing? Give reasons for your view.

Interpreting how words are used

Select several key passages from your selected text. In pairs:

1. Read them aloud two or three times. Try adopting different emphasis and different tones, and discuss which reading is more convincing and why.
2. Consider how you might interpret how characters and themes have been constructed in different ways, and why. Rank your interpretations in order of plausibility.

Interpreting and the imagination

Select a character you either admire or condemn in your text and identify some examples of how the author has positioned you to feel this way about them.

Now consider how you could interpret this character in a more negative or positive light, selecting evidence from the text to support this alternative reading.

How to develop and justify a detailed interpretation

1. Review the exam topics set in the VCAA English Sample Examination for your selected texts, and where relevant:
 - a. identify the ways in which a topic may indicate that several interpretations are possible
 - b. plan several responses that present and justify alternative interpretations
 - c. discuss which interpretation is more convincing and why
2. In groups, develop as many topics as you can that focus on the ways the creator of your text has:
 - a. constructed ideas, characters and themes
 - b. used structures, features and conventions to construct meaning
 - c. expressed or implied a point of view and values
3. As a class, develop a list of topics and brainstorm possible interpretations you might develop in response to each of them.
 - a. Consider what evidence you would present to support each interpretation.
 - b. Discuss whether or not the interpretations can be supported by evidence from the text.
 - c. Consider which interpretations you find most convincing.